

POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM

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173 and court historians, place his birth in the middle of the fifteenth century.¹ At this time, the tradition runs, there was no kingdom of Nupe, only small chieftainships which, among the Beni, were united in a confederacy under the chief of Nku, a village near the confluence of Niger and Kaduna. At that time the Nupe people were tributary to the *Atta* (king) of the Gara, at Eda (Idah), far down the Niger. The tribute was paid in slaves, and every family head had annually to contribute one male member of his house. These slaves, as tradition has it, were always sister's sons. It so happened that the son of the *Atta* Gara came hunting to Nku in Nupe country. Here he met the daughter of the chief of Nku, a young widow, fell in love with her and lived with her for some time. When the death of his father recalled him to his country, to succeed to the throne of the Gara, this woman was pregnant. He left her a charm and a ring to give to their child when it was born. This child was Tsoede. Then the old chief of Nku died, his son became chief, and when Tsoede was 30 years of age the new chief sent him, as his sister's son, as slave to Eda. The *Atta* Gara recognized his son in the new slave by the charm and ring which he was wearing, and kept him near his person, treating him almost like his legitimate sons. Tsoede stayed for thirty years at his father's court. Once the king fell victim to a mysterious illness which nobody could cure. The court diviner prophesied that only a fruit from a very high oil-palm outside the town, plucked by one man, would cure the king. All his legitimate sons tried, in vain, to obtain the precious fruit. Finally Tsoede made the attempt, and succeeded. But in this attempt he cut his lip so badly that he looked almost like a man born with a split lip. From this time—and this still holds true to-day—all hare-lipped boys born in Nupe are named Edegi. Tsoede's achievement, which made him still more beloved by his father and honoured by the court, evoked the jealousy of his half-brothers. Thus, when the *Atta* felt his death coming he advised his son to flee, and to return to his own country the rule of which he bestowed on him as a parting gift. He assisted him in his flight, he gave him riches of all kinds and bestowed on him various insignia of kingship: a bronze canoe 'as only kings have', manned with twelve Nupe slaves; the bronze *kakati*, the long trumpets which are still the insignia of kings in the whole of Northern Nigeria; state drums hung with brass bells; and the heavy iron chains and fetters which, endowed with strong magic, have become the emblems of the king's judicial power, and are known to-day as *egbā Tsoede*, Chain of Tsoede.²

Now comes the story of Tsoede's adventurous flight from Eda, travel-

¹ See Appendix III. There exist several versions of the myth. I am giving here the version which I learned from the *Etnu* of Patigi, the last living descendant of the Tsoede dynasty.

² The villages where these chains are found (all lying in the Niger valley) were entrusted with the special mission of acting as the 'King's Hangmen'. I have described this organization in *Man*, 1935, 143. Two places on the Niger, Tada and Jebba Island, possess sacred bronze figures which, like the chains, are linked with the tradition and worship of Tsoede. According to some versions of the Tsoede myth they too were a gift from the *Atta* to the departing Tsoede; the *Etnu* of Patigi, my informant for the version given here, denied this.

567 themselves; so were children born of a slave father who married a free woman, and also of a slave father who bought a girl slave for himself and married her. If, however, slave married slave, the marriage being arranged—i.e. the purchase price for the girl paid—by the slave's master, the children remained slaves. But these slaves in the second generation were slaves of a different kind. They were no longer called *wufi*, but *mangi*, 'born as child' (i.e. as freeman). Though not really free they were exempted from many of the disabilities of slavery. The children of a *mangi* who married another *mangi* were themselves *mangi* slaves again. But a *mangi* could not be sold by his master, nor could he be maltreated or killed—in the latter case his parents could obtain legal redress and would be paid the usual purchase price as 'blood-money'. [682] At the death of a *mangi* only half of his property could be claimed by the master, the other half was inherited by his own family. The *mangi* also had family farms of their own, and were generally treated like full members of the household in everything except that they were not entitled to any share in the inheritance of their master's property. A *mangi* was brought up together with the children of the house, was given the same education, and, like the sons of the house, served in the mounted household troops. Many *mangi* would free themselves, or at least marry free women. But the names of these house-born slaves invariably betrayed their origin; for they were named by their masters, and given not the usual Nupe names but names made up of some well-known blessing formula, of the first words of a proverb, and such like, for example: Adetsua, from *a de 'tsu à sei Sokó*, 'there is no Lord but God'; Barsu, from *bar su ga Allah* (Hausa), 'leave them to God'. [551]

567 It would be wrong, however, to assume that slavery in Nupe carried with it a stigma. True, the people of Bida still speak with contempt of the 'pagans' and 'slaves' (the two terms are almost synonymous) into whose countries their fathers had carried their profitable raids. But, 554 characteristically for Nupe, the stigma attaches to the humble status rather than to the misfortune of having been made a slave. It disappeared with the signs of success and prosperity, open to slaves as to anyone. The wretched slave who could never rise above a menial labourer had to bear the ignominy of his position. But in the case of the trusted slave in a noble household, and above all the successful, freed slave, the taint of slavery meant little more than, in their own words, 'luck of war'. Slaves who served in the houses of the high nobility did indeed share some of the splendour that surrounded the position of their masters. Able and faithful slaves were rewarded with the position of head slaves, overseers, bailiffs; their masters bestowed upon them rich presents and gifts of land—more land than they cared to work with their own hands, having become men of wealth and importance. Their masters bestowed upon them, above all, special titles, household ranks—the ubiquitous symbol of social rise in Nupe, which in this case obliterated even the last external symbol of slave status, the typical slave-names.

000 The royal houses of Nupe, like every nobleman's house, had their host